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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: S/GWI PROJECT PROPOSAL

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: Embassy Ashgabat proposes that S/GWI support the Tech Age Girls program in Turkmenistan. The Tech Age Girls project will address low technology literacy among young women in Turkmenistan and will encourage civic participation among this critical demographic group. Tech Age Girls is a proven program that has shown spectacular results in the past and, with a new model for implementation that includes local partners and private sponsorship, will increase women's involvement in the economy. END SUMMARY.

#### MASSIVE GAPS IN TECHNOLOGY TRAINING FOR WOMEN

13. (SBU) During the first 17 years of Post-Soviet independence, Turkmenistan regressed drastically in the spheres of education, women's integration, and technology. Former President Niyazov outlawed the internet, limited mandatory education to nine years, and implemented severe cultural changes that narrowed the role of women in leadership and society. In the three years since Niyazov's death, Turkmenistan has made limited progress to rectify the harm caused by the Niyazov era. Internet and computer training is still limited, human capacity nearly non-existent, and women's involvement in economy limited.

#### A PROVEN PROGRAM - TECH AGE GIRLS

14. (U) In 2007, the State Department began the first of three successful cycles of the Tech Age Girls (TAG) project in Turkmenistan. The project addresses the lack of skilled women in the field of information technology (IT) by encouraging and training the most promising young women. Through a process in which they have the opportunity to further develop IT skills, learn from successful female leaders, and design their own community projects, participants take their first steps toward entering one of the most promising and dynamic fields in the global economy.

15. (U) The program selects 100 girls for training that includes introductory courses on IT, Web design, and leadership skills. Beyond the training, tech age girls are taught the values of community service and are required to lead activities for Global Youth Service Day in their home towns. After the first three months

of training, each participant is able to regularly update their own blog and website focused on youth or women leaders in their communities. At the end of the year-long program, 20 finalists are selected to participate in a two-week conference in Ashgabat. In the past, UNICEF and the OSCE have supported the final conference. After the conference, each Tech Age girl receives a small grant to help them implement a community-based project.

¶6. (U) After three successful years, the project came to a close with the end of the Global Connections and Exchange Program (GCE) in Turkmenistan. GCE had been funded by a U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) grant and was administered by IREX. Now with a partnership between IREX, American Councils and a local NGO, Embassy Ashgabat would like to resurrect Tech Age Girls.

#### HOW DOES TECH AGE GIRLS WORK?

¶7. (U) Tech Age Girls is a unique, innovative project for girls of grades 7 - 9 that puts technology to use in identifying and developing future women leaders in places where girls may not have the same opportunities as boys. Through local NGOs and with outside trainers, the project competitively selects a group of young women who demonstrate the potential for leadership and a commitment to sharing their enthusiasm, talent, and skills with their peers. TAG also helps young women contribute their voices to public discussions of critical issues and promotes the Internet presence of girls' perspectives in local languages. Tech Age Girls participants join in a series of guided events that bring out their abilities, equip them for professional achievement, and inspire them to become leaders in their communities.

¶8. (U) Tech Age Girls is a three phase project. Phase One lasts up

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to six months, during which participants are selected and strengthen their IT skills while forming an online community based on a series of online events. Phase Two brings the highest achievers to a one-to two-week in-person workshop in the capital city, where girls participate in leadership training and meet influential, national-level women leaders. Phase Three begins when participants return to their communities, remaining connected to a network of young women leaders who are implementing local projects and training their peers in key IT skills. Upon completion of the first year, participants become mentors for following groups of Tech Age Girls, enhancing project sustainability and spreading its benefits even wider.

¶9. (U) The project follows several steps. First, applicants submit essays, create and update personal blogs, and volunteer in their communities. Second, entries are reviewed by a selection committee of project partners and evaluated based on their level of commitment and consideration of discussion topics; semi-finalists are then selected. Third, semi-finalists complete introductory courses in IT, Web design, and leadership. Meanwhile, they continue to update their blogs, participate in bi-weekly online forums on women's issues, correspond weekly with mentors, and plan and lead volunteer initiatives. After the forums, semi-finalists design a website about a youth leader in their community. Finally, finalists are selected based on the impact of their projects and their demonstrated potential to serve as local leaders. The finalists attend a two-week workshop in the capital on advanced Web design, leadership, problem solving, and project design. During their second week, they participate in a mini-internship at an IT firm, international organization, or government body. After the finalist return home from the seminar, finalists implement the projects they designed at the workshop and foster the development of the next year's group of Tech Age Girls.

¶10. (U) This model has worked, because IREX is selective with the participants, and uses the competitive nature of the application process to push them to develop and produce. TAG participants are producing at every stage. By requiring development of skills and resources and participation in TAG events over a period of several months, we learn which participants are most serious and ready for intensive training. By making this final selection, we focus on the

best participants and devote fewer resources to those participants less likely to make an impact in their communities and follow through. The finalists are also taught to teach others, and they expand the impact of the training and opportunities we provided them upon their return home. Because they have worked six months together, the participants are more likely to communicate with each other independently and work together on projects.

#### TECH AGE GIRLS BUDGET

¶11. (U) The total budget for implementation of this new round of Tech Age Girls is \$66,869.

##### ¶A. Personnel

Washington Program Coordinator \$1,500  
Program Director - based in Kazakhstan \$2,100  
IREX Turkmenistan Country Coordinator \$396  
TAG Coordinator \$5,200  
IREX Training and Web Development Coordinator \$810  
Regional TAG Coordinators (4 - coordinators) \$7,000  
Subtotal Personnel \$17,006

##### ¶B. Fringe Benefits

Washington staff \$332  
Expatriate Staff \$465  
Subtotal Fringe \$797

##### ¶C. Travel

Local Travel Pool - TAG Coordinator + TAG Regional Coordinators \$1,600  
Finalist Travel to Ashgabat for Summer Conference \$630  
Ground Transportation \$700  
Summer Conference Meals (Lunch+Dinner+Coffee Breaks) \$10,500

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Summer Conference Lodging in Ashgabat (includes breakfast) \$4,200  
Subtotal Travel \$17,630

##### ¶D. Supplies

Office Supplies/Printing/Postage \$5,270  
Equipment maintenance \$300  
TAG Summer Conference  
T-shirts for Summer Conference \$420  
Conference Hall Rental \$250  
Subtotal Supplies \$6,240

##### ¶E. Other Direct Costs

Trainers at the TAG Conference \$360  
TAG Community Project Mini Grants \$2,000  
Office Rent and maintenance \$1,200  
Office Communications - phone, Internet \$960  
American Corner Extended Hours Operation Costs \$8,000  
Subtotal Other Direct Costs \$12,520

##### ¶F. Indirect Costs

DC Facilities \$402  
DC Overhead \$558  
Field Overhead \$5,235  
General & Administrative \$6,481  
Subtotal Indirect Costs \$12,676

#### THE IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION

¶12. (U) Tech Age Girls is a program designed and previously implemented by IREX. IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development. Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of over \$60 million and a staff of 500 professionals worldwide. IREX and its partner IREX Europe deliver cross-cutting programs and consulting expertise in more than 100 countries.

#### A PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

¶13. (U) Post has a plan for the long-term sustainability of Tech Age Girls. With a commitment for a private-public partnership with Chevron in hand, Post foresees an expansion of the project to reach more girls and provide better internship opportunities. Additionally, this new phase of Tech Age Girls calls for IREX to train a local partner for the long-term implementation of the project. The local partner, an initiative group focused on education and women's issues, will shadow IREX trainers and work together to be able to replicate the program on a local scale. Post anticipates that in the future, with a lower-cost local implementor and continued private support, Tech Age Girls can continue to successfully operate in Turkmenistan. The project will be managed and monitored at Post by the Public Affairs Section of the Embassy and will be integrated into the assistance objectives of Post and the SCA bureau. In February 2010 with Post completed an EUR/ACE sponsored review of its assistance objectives. The Tech Age Girls address three of the five primary themes in our assistance objectives - increasing access to global information, increasing civic participation, and increasing access to quality education. TAG will allow these women to integrate themselves into the global economy, encourage them to become more active citizens, and improve their ability to receive a quality education.

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